

MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC# **396-2016**

LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Philip Levine and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jimmy L. Morales, City Manager

DATE: September 23, 2016

SUBJECT: **Update on Police Department's Body Worn Camera Program
and DOJ-Funded Study**

This Letter to Commission is prepared to update the Mayor and Commission on the Police Department's Body Worn Camera (BWC) program. It also summarizes the methodology the Department will use in the federally funded study of body cameras that it is about to undertake in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice and a pre-eminent scholar/expert from Cambridge University.

Background

On May 5, 2015, the Police Department launched a BWC pilot program. Thirty (30) officers participated in the initial launch of the Taser-manufactured Axon cameras. The participant group was made up of the Motor Unit, one daytime patrol squad, both Redevelopment Area (RDA) squads assigned to the Lincoln Road and City Center area, the Neighborhood Resource Officers (NROs), the Homeless Resource Officers (HRO) and neighborhood beat officers in the three patrol areas. The purpose of the pilot program was to test all elements of a BWC program, including officer training and deployment, the technical aspects of the capture, download, storage and recovery of video, the development of a workable policy on when to use the cameras, the handling of and transition of evidence into the criminal justice system, etc.

As the pilot program progressed, cameras were given to additional officers. The lessons learned during the pilot phase were used to help shape the Department's current BWC policy, which has been amended multiple times based on lessons from the pilot program and has become the admired model and standard for BWC deployment by other police departments in Miami-Dade County.

By the time the pilot program ended in January, 2016, and the Department moved into official deployment, 70 officers, including supervisors, had been trained and issued BWCs. Since then, a total of 101 cameras have been deployed and are now in use. The ultimate goal of the Department is to eventually outfit every Miami Beach police officer with a BWC.

Leader in Local Law Enforcement

The Miami Beach Police Department is now a recognized leader in the South Florida law enforcement community in the deployment and use of BWCs. Since the inception of the program, the Department has hosted multiple police agencies that are seeking to learn and garner information to support the implementation of their own programs. The Department has also trained prosecutors from the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office and has partnered with them to establish protocols for the use and submission of video

evidence from BWCs into Miami-Dade criminal proceedings. The MBPD is touted by the State Attorney's Office as the model agency for designing and implementing BWC policy and technology into a police workforce.

New Technology

Now in the second year of the BWC program, the Department recently took receipt of 320 second-generation BWCs, the Taser Axon 2. Roughly half of these cameras will be given to additional officers over the next few months. The rest will be held in abeyance until completion of the DOJ-funded study of BWCs is completed at the end of 2017.

In the coming weeks, officers in specialized assignments to include K-9, Crime Suppression and the Marine Patrol Units are slated to be trained and issued cameras. Roughly 100 additional patrol officers will also receive cameras, as will all detectives. Improvements in the new Axon camera include:

- Dual audio channels to make voices more distinct while reducing noise
- Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity
- The ability to mute audio
- The ability to tag points in the video while recording
- Replaceable battery
- Increased storage capacity from 8 GB to 64 GB
- Increased record time from a maximum of 12 hours to up to 70 hours
- Improved video resolution from 480P to include 720P and 1020P

Cambridge Study

The use of BWC is a relatively new but rapidly expanding tool in American policing. Although there have been limited studies on their uses, until now, there has not been a comprehensive examination of the full impact of these devices on the entire breadth of a police department's operation. The Department of Justice has funded the Miami Beach Police Department to do the first such study.

The MBPD has partnered with Dr. Barak Ariel of the University of Cambridge to conduct a one-year comparative study to address the effects of BWCs on the daily activities of patrol officers, on specialized patrol units, and on detectives assigned to the Investigation Division. Dr. Ariel is best known for completing the most-cited BWC study to date, of the Rialto, California Police Department several years ago. His agreement to partner with us was considered crucial to the MBPD winning of one of only three DOJ-funded grants in the nation to study BWCs.

In addition to studying use of BWCs by all MBPD detectives (a novel approach that no other agency is taking on), 200 patrol officers will participate in the MBPD study. During the course of 2017, half of the 200 patrol officers will use cameras during calls for service, and the other half (the control group) will not. In addition, relevant historical data from the use of BWCs by all patrol officers already given cameras to date will be examined.

The study will seek to address a host of questions, the answers to which will likely impact all of law enforcement both nationally and internationally. Some broad questions include:

- What are the effects of BWC on the criminal justice system, ranging from arrests to convictions?
- How are the courts affected by the use of BWC evidence compared to having none at all?

Beginning on January 1, 2017 and ending on December 31, 2017, the study will also attempt to answer more specific questions such as:

- Does using BWCs lead to fewer or more arrests?
- Is there an increase or decrease in the use of force when affecting an arrest?
- Is there a rise or reduction in complaints against officers who use cameras?
- Does having a camera reduce the likelihood of assaults against officers?

Summary

The Miami Beach Police Department began its BWC pilot program by deploying 30 cameras in May 2015. Today there are 101 cameras being used by officers. The Department is seen as a leader in BWCs among other local law enforcement agencies and has hosted multiple departments interested in implementing a camera program. The Department recently took possession of an additional 320 second-generation Taser, Axon cameras. The ultimate goal of the organization is to provide every officer with a BWC.

To date, studies on the use of BWCs in law enforcement have not produced sufficient useful data for a true finding of their value to law enforcement or of their limitations. The Department has entered into a BWC study with the University of Cambridge. From January to December 2017, the use of BWC by MBPD patrol officers will be examined. The results of this study will likely have a significant impact on law enforcement.

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